

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5936

As Reported By House Committee On:
Criminal Justice & Corrections

Title: An act relating to offender education.

Brief Description: Requiring a report on alternatives for increasing offender access to postsecondary academic and vocational opportunities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl, Long, Hargrove, Franklin, Bauer and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Criminal Justice & Corrections: 2/20/98, 2/26/98 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Ballasiotes, Chairman; Benson, Vice Chairman; Koster, Vice Chairman; Quall, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; O'Brien, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cairnes; Dickerson; Hickel; McCune; Mitchell; Radcliff and Sullivan.

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background: In 1995, the Legislature adopted a law requiring the Department of Corrections (DOC) to prioritize its available resources to meet the following educational goals, specified in order of priority (HB 2010):

- (1) Achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent, and achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release;
- (2) Additional work and education programs that are compatible with an offender's case management plan; and
- (3) Other work and education programs as appropriate.

The 1995 legislation required the DOC to develop a formula by which inmates would contribute to the cost of certain educational and vocational programs, based on their ability to pay. The formula requires offenders to pay a portion of the costs or tuition for any second or subsequent vocational program associated with their work programs

and any A.A. or B.A. programs that are part of their case management plans. The formula also requires offenders to pay all costs and tuition of any post-secondary academic program and any second or subsequent vocational program that is not part of their case management plan.

As a result of these statutory priorities, which were implemented in the context of a 5 percent reduction in the department's education budget, most post-secondary academic programs have been eliminated from state correctional institutions. Many vocational programs were also reduced or eliminated that were determined to have insufficient linkages to correctional industries work programs or employment opportunities upon release.

Summary of Bill: The DOC is required to prepare a report to the Legislature by December 1, 1998, on alternatives for increasing offender access to post-secondary academic and vocational programs. The report is to be prepared in consultation with representatives from the community colleges and other educational service providers currently contracting with the department.

The report must present alternatives for increasing access within existing resources, as well as alternatives that may require additional funding. Such alternatives must include an implementation plan for pilot projects utilizing fee-based programs, and may include recommendations on correspondence and video telecourses and the feasibility and desirability of connecting department facilities to the K-20 technology network.

An exemption is made to the mandatory deductions requirement in current law to exclude funds received by the department on behalf of offenders for payment of one fee-based education or vocational program that is associated with an inmate's work program or a placement decision made by the department to prepare an inmate for work upon release.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: There is no state cost to this bill however it would require the Department of Corrections in collaboration with the community colleges to come up with recommendations for increasing offender access to vocational and post-secondary academic programs as well as fee-based programs. Statistics have shown that educated offenders show a positive change in their behavior and only about ten to fourteen percent recidivate based on past experience.

Overall, educational programming helps reduce criminal recidivism. The increase in education for offenders will result in a benefit for our communities and taxpayers. Education will reduce reoccurring criminal acts by offenders which in turn will reduce taxes since we will not have to pay for incarceration costs.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Jeanne Kohl, prime sponsor; Jean Stewart, Department of Corrections; and Warren Clare, self (pro).